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Michigan Association of Railroad Passengers

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Study looks for speed savings between Detroit and Chicago

By Larry Sobczak

The U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) is undertaking a new $4 million study to reduce passenger and freight rail congestion between Detroit and Chicago along the high speed rail corridor.

The USDOT announced May 4 that it will contribute $3.2 million towards the study while Michigan, Indiana, Illinois and the Norfolk Southern Railway will contribute $200,000 each.

"This is an important partnership in our efforts to reinvent Michigan, specifically creating an accelerated rail connection between Detroit and Chicago for both citizens and businesses," said Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder.

According to USDOT officials, an important focus of the study will be reducing congestion by linking a double track passenger main to the 110 mph service at Porter. The study will build on progress Michigan has already made by achieving 110 mph service from Porter to Kalamazoo.

"This is an important step

(See STUDY, page 8)

Amtrak and Canadian National trains meet in the city of Detroit. This is one of three areas in Michigan that Amtrak claims it is delayed by the freight train operator.

(Photo by Steve Sobel)

Amtrak and CN argue about delays

Amtrak and Canadian National Railroad (CN) have asked the Surface Transportation Board (STB) for a mediator to resolve a dispute about Amtrak's on-time performance along CN's railroads in the U.S. including three segments in Michigan.

On March 27, Amtrak and CN jointly filed a motion before the STB requesting that STB delay action for 90 days and appoint a mediator to supervise discussions to resolve the issues.

Amtrak is hosted on three sections of CN-owned railroads in Michigan including the Port Huron to Battle Creek segmentused by Amtrak's Blue Water service, the Detroit to Pontiac railroad used by Amtrak's Wolverine service and a shorter section of track in Battle Creek used by both the Blue Water and Wolverine.

The dispute began in January when Amtrak filed a 46 page complaint with the STB stating that CN was purposely delaying passenger trains hosted on CN railroads throughout the U.S.

The complaint details CN's poor performance and gives many specific examples, pointing out that CN delivers more late trains than any other carrier in the country, by far. The examples include putting Amtrak on sidings in favor of freights, not providing Amtrak with daily operating bulletins (engineers are not allowed to leave their starting points without these bulletins) and failure to meet with Amtrak to iron out problems.

Under the legislation that transferred national passenger rail operations to Amtrak in 1971, railroads hosting Amtrak are not supposed to give freight trains preference over passenger trains.

In its complaint, Amtrak claims:

- CN failed to meet standards for host-responsible delays for the Blue Water service in every single quarter of Fiscal Year 2011. CN's high delays contributed to the Blue Water's failure to meet the End Point OTP stan-

(See ARGUE, page 8)

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Clippings from newspapers and magazines must include the publication's name and date. Photos sent in by e-mail should be in JPEG format.

We reserve the right to edit all submissions.

To subscribe to this publication, join MARP by filling out the application below. All MARP members receive a copy of this publication sent to their home or business.

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About MARP…

The Michigan Association of Railroad Passengers, Inc. (MARP) was established in 1973 as a consumer advocacy group to improve intercity rail and bus service, improve local transit and encourage the preservation of historic railroad stations.

MARP is not affiliated with Amtrak, the railroads, governments or any political party. MARP is incorporated as a Michigan non-profit organization and is exempt from federal income tax under the IRS code, 501(c)(3) as a charitable educational organization. Dues and donations to MARP may be tax-deductible in accordance with the IRS code.

MARP is an all-volunteer organization. Its membership consists of passengers and citizens who want a viable, balanced transportation system in Michigan. We can all use the help we can get!

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Michigan residents help boost ridership at Ohio and Indiana Amtrak stations

By Nathan Nietering

An Amtrak train arrives at the Elkhart station. (Photo by Nathan Nietering)

Amtrak stations just "south of the border" in northern Indiana and Ohio provide a travel choice not just for their home states, but for passengers from southern Michigan.

These stations include Toledo, Ohio, and Waterloo, Elkhart, and South Bend, Indiana. All are served by Amtrak's long-distance Capitol Limited and Lake Shore Limited, which connect Chicago with points on the east coast. Both trains provide full sleeping and dining cars in addition to coach cars on their routes.

Michigan tabulated record Amtrak ridership during Fiscal Year 2011, with over 880,000 boardings and alightings at the state's twenty-two stations. Michigan residents also contributed to another increase in Amtrak station use, just beyond the state line.

Stations "south of the border" have also seen an increase in ridership. Considering many travellers are from Michigan, it could mean travelers meandered to neighboring states for increased frequency options, better equipment (dining and sleeping cars) and more direct connections to the east.

Information about these stations and their services is particularly timely given the past delays on the Michigan Line highlighted elsewhere in this publication. For those living in the southern tiers of Michigan counties, the trains just to our south provide seats with more legroom in the long-distance coaches, and additional dining options in the full-service Dining Car. In the current era of Michigan Line delays, the timeliness of these long-distance services may be an added draw for passengers going to Chicago. These trains also provide rail links for Michigan passengers to several eastern destinations, including Pittsburgh, Washington DC, Boston, and New York City.

Here's a breakdown of the activity at each station and what to expect if you find yourself driving "south of the border."

Toledo's Central Union Station is the busiest of these stations. The renovated lower level of the Art-Moderne station building is home to a large waiting room and staffed ticket window with checked baggage service offered.

Ridership has increased for several years at this station, with a count of 66,413 passengers in 2011. This increase is in part due to the guaranteed Amtrak Thruway bus connection from Michigan (The Michigan Passenger, Winter 2009). This provides a daily connection from the Amtrak stations in East Lansing, Ann Arbor, Dearborn and Detroit with the eastbound Capitol Limted and Lake Shore at Toledo each evening. The returning motorcoach receives passengers from the westbound trains in the early morning and brings them back north.

Alternately, a long-term parking lot provides space for passengers from afar to leave their cars. While Amtrak does not offer security for this lot, I have parked my car at this lot for over a week and didn't experience any problems.

Indiana's three stations serve passengers in the northern counties of that state as well as passengers from south-central and southwest Michigan.

Waterloo, located just a few miles east of I-69, is also the stop closest to Fort Wayne, which provides a significant source of the 22,661 passengers who boarded or alighted here in 2011. This station offers the fewest services of any of the four stations in this article: providing a pair of simple enclosed metal and Plexiglass shelters beside the platform. Parking for long-term and short-term use is also provided.

In 2010, the town of Waterloo completed restoration of the historic New York Central station, located near the Amtrak platform site. That same year, the town was awarded a federal 2010 grant for $1.8 million to extend the platform, add new platform lighting, meet ADA compliance, and open a portion of the restored station building for Amtrak passenger use.

At the present time, the town is working through the final details of the plan with the USDOT and Amtrak, according to DeWayne Nodine, Town Manager of Waterloo. Amtrak's plan should have construction begin early in 2013 and complete by the end of that year.

The historic station at Elkhart has shown the most impressive recent growth.

Until 2001, this was a staffed Amtrak station with an agent on duty at train time. Due to budget cuts, the station became unstaffed that year and ridership plummeted from 15,610 in 2000 down to 6,062 in 2003. The Capitol Limited stop was removed in 2001 and the extension of the Pennsylvanian west of Pittsburgh was removed in 2003, leaving just a single train departing the station each day.

The waiting room in the Richardsonian-Prairie Style building became just a place where the heat was on in the winter.

Fortunately, improvements began around 2005. Amtrak reinstated the Capitol Limited stop, providing a second daily departure, and volunteers began to maintain the waiting room and assist passengers at the station, myself included.

Amtrak hasn't reinstated the agent at Elkhart, but the work of volunteers is certainly making an impact.

Ridership since 2003 has increased nearly every year, and has since surpassed the 2000 level, to reach 17,070 in 2011, nearly three times the 2003 level.

Given Elkhart's fairly close proximity to US-131, passengers come from as far away as Kalamazoo and Grand Rapids to travel out of the Elkhart station.

Today, the waiting room is open at train time in the morning and evening, and is well looked after by the volunteer caretaker. The building is located at the south end of downtown and has room for both short term and long term parking.

This would be a good and secure location to provide a Quik-Trak ticketing machine, which would provide an on-site ticketing option for passengers.

Several Amtrak stations are located in the Michiana area, and the South Bend station offers the greatest number of services.

Built as the South Bend terminus on the electrified South Shore Line, the station building today serves as the city's Amtrak station, located on the west side of town. This is a staffed station, providing a waiting room and checked baggage service on both the Capitol Limited and Lake Shore Limited routes.

South Bend is a gateway station to southwest Michigan, much as the Niles station is a gateway to South Bend on the Michigan side. 23,662 passengers were counted here in 2011, which includes a sizable proportion from both Michigan and Notre Dame.

Nathan Nietering is a MARP member whom you may find riding some of the rails on the East Coast right now.

February, March and April meeting highlights

By Hugh Gurney
MARP Secretary

Attendance at the February, March and April meetings has been excellent, with a sprinkling of new faces and those of some who have been less active in recent years. Steve Sobel, our timekeeper, has done a good job of keeping meetings on track.

The February 11 meeting was held at the Old Dog Tavern, adjacent to the Grand Elk Railroad in Kalamazoo. We were welcomed by State Representative Sean McCann of the 60th District, who is sponsoring a bill to require Amtrak to carry bicycles aboard Michigan trains. Mike Madill and John Conor discussed the history of the Chicago, Kalamazoo and Saginaw Railroad (CK&S), which connected with the Grand Trunk south of Kalamazoo, then proceeded north through Kalamazoo, then northeasterly through Barry County to Hastings. The Grand Elk continues to use the section between the Grand Trunk at Pavilion and Kalamazoo. Madill and Conor are working to assure that the CK&S is not forgotten, putting up markers along the old right of way and at several surviving bridges and depots.

Tim Hoeffner, newly appointed Director of Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) Office of Rail, reviewed the planned roll out of 110 mph speeds on the Amtrak owned portion of the Wolverine and Blue Water routes between Kalamazoo and Porter, Indiana. A special train will depart Chicago at 7:00 a.m. on Wednesday, February 15, and operate at up to 110 mph between Porter and Kalamazoo, then return to Chicago. Festivities are scheduled for New Buffalo and Kalamazoo. Hoeffner noted that the Governor's budget has a new format, with a number of separate items dealing with rail folded into larger packets.

Chase urged members to contact their U.S. Representative, urging defeat of H.R. 7 which proposes elimination of dedicated funding for transit from federal gas tax revenue. Hinkins reported that the Troy City Council reversed itself in January, so plans for the Troy Transportation Center can proceed.

The March 17 meeting took place at Pontiac's handsome new transportation center, which serves Amtrak, Greyhound and Suburban Mobility Authority for Regional Transportation (SMART), the local transit agency for Oakland, Macomb and Wayne counties. After watching Wolverine #353 board about twenty passengers and depart on time for Chicago, we were welcomed by Jim Fetzer, Deputy General Manager of Operations for SMART. Fetzer is looking for ways to better connect SMART with Amtrak service at Pontiac, Birmingham-Troy, Royal Oak and Dearborn. The planned Rapid Bus will also connect with Amtrak at several stations. Fetzer urged support of legislation creating a Regional Transportation Authority, now under consideration in Lansing. Such an authority would help transportation providers in Wayne, Washtenaw, Oakland and Macomb counties better coordinate their services.

Chase noted that TRANS4M (Transportation for Michigan) would be staging a Transportation Odyssey to build support statewide for the Regional Transportation Authority. Beginning March 21, participants using local public transportation, Amtrak and Indian Trails, would transit from Detroit Metro Airport to downtown Detroit, then to Birmingham, Kalamazoo, Grand Rapids and Traverse City.

Both MDOT and Amtrak are supporting New Buffalo's application for a Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery, or TIGER Discretionary Grant to build a ten mile passing track on the Amtrak line between Dowagiac and Niles and to fund an engineering study on linking CSX tracks with Amtrak just north of New Buffalo. Such a connection would permit the Pere Marquette to serve New Buffalo and access the 110 mph route. MDOT has approved a station stop on the Pere Marquette at Fennville. Amtrak and CSX will now review this proposal.

Canadian National has responded to Amtrak's petition to the Surface Transportation Board protesting that CN unreasonably delays Amtrak trains. CN has asked that a decision be postponed until a suit by the American Association of Railroads is decided. That suit contends that the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2008 (PRIIA) Section 209 is unconstitutional because it permits Amtrak, a private company, to establish and enforce legal regulations. CN also contends

The March 21 meeting in Kalamazoo was well-attended at the Old Dog Tavern next to the Gran Elk Railroad tracks.

(Photo by Steve Sobel)

that Congress never intended that Amtrak have preference on privately owned railroad

The Executive Committee accepted the resignation of Treasurer Dave Randall, who is relocating to Texas to be closer to elderly relatives.

On April 21, MARP met at the well maintained 1880 Chelsea Depot, where we were welcomed by members of the Chelsea Depot Association. Chelsea railroad historian Robert D. Shannon gave an excellent presentation on the history of the Michigan Central Railroad and the evolution of railroad service in Chelsea. Shannon showed a blown up photo of Michigan Central's Mercury taking on water on the run from a water trough just east of Chelsea. The Mercury made the trip from Detroit to Chicago in four hours during the 1940's.

The present depot is the third to serve Chelsea. In the 1890's, eight trains a day stopped there. Fortunately, the Chelsea Depot Association saved the structure from demolition by Conrail in the 1970's. Most funding for upkeep of the depot comes from rentals for wedding receptions, banquets and other functions.

Michigan will be receiving twenty new bi-level coaches out of a total order of 130 cars. The coaches will be similar to ones currently in use in California. The contract should be awarded in October, with the first of the new cars arriving in 2015. New locomotives are also scheduled for delivery in 2015.

The Michigan Senate is expected to take up legislation for the Regional Transportation Authority in the next week.

The Surface Transportation Board has received a petition from MDOT for acquisition of the Dearborn-Kalamazoo stretch of the Norfolk Southern sometime between April 30 and May 31. The Wayne Yard and the Willow Run Yard are excluded from the acquisition.

The SS Badger, which provides ferry service between Ludington, Michigan, and Manitowoc, Wisconsin, may be shut down at the end of December, 2012, because it continues to dump toxic coal ash into Lake Michigan. The vessel was constructed by the Chesapeake and Ohio Railroad as a railroad car ferry between Ludington and several points on the western shores of Lake Michigan. Plans are in the works for conversion of the ship to natural gas, but that is expensive and will take time. A committee including Monteith, Chase, Gurney and Larry Bean of the Chelsea Depot Association will review the most suitable response for MARP.

Despite the withdrawal of the University of Michigan from the Fuller Road Transportation Center project, the City of Ann Arbor plans to confirm a contract for design of a station at that location near the University of Michigan Medical Center in the very near future. Work is underway on the new Grand Rapids Amtrak station. Westrain plans to involve Chambers of Commerce, Convention and Visitor Bureaus and municipal leaders in its promotion of a second Pere Marquette frequency. Repair of last year's water damage to the Durand Union Station is now complete.

MARP will have a table at the large National Train Day event in Toledo on May 5. National Train Day observances are planned at a number of stations in Michigan on May 12.

The next meeting is scheduled at the Muskegon Railroad Depot at 10:00 a.m. on Saturday, June 16.

Trip report:

Amtrak reward points allow for an adventure

BY JP Descamps

My great train adventure began after I accrued enough Amtrak Guest Reward MasterCard points over the course of two years to travel first class while enjoying deluxe sleeper compartments on all long distance trains across this great country of ours.

My journey began in Kalamazoo where I boarded the local Wolverine train to Chicago. From Union Station in Chicago, I boarded the Southwest Chief, a huge bi-level, 14 car cruise-ship-on-rails headed to Albuquerque, N.M., for a three day visit.

After exploring northern New Mexico and southern Colorado, I continued my travels on the westbound Southwest Chief again and made my way to Los Angeles where I caught the plush Coast Starlight to Portland, OR.

After two days in Portland, I boarded a local, well patronized Cascades train to Seattle for a quick connection on the infamous Empire Builder to Minneapolis.

My journey far exceeded any expectations while traveling aboard all short and long distance Amtrak trains. They do a wonderful job …and the food on the long distance trains was nothing short of haute cuisine.

I must say, the most awesome portion of the entire journey was the ride on the Coast Starlight. While hugging the Pacific coast line, the scenery, the food, the wine and cheese tasting and exceptional service from a hand selected staff created wonderful memories while in the confines of a plush, rolling palace called the Pacific Parlor Car.

In fact, all the train rides were so good that when I flew back home from Minneapolis to Kalamazoo on a cramped regional jet, I thought to myself ...I would have boarded another train in a New York second versus getting on this “Ken and Barbie trainer jet”.

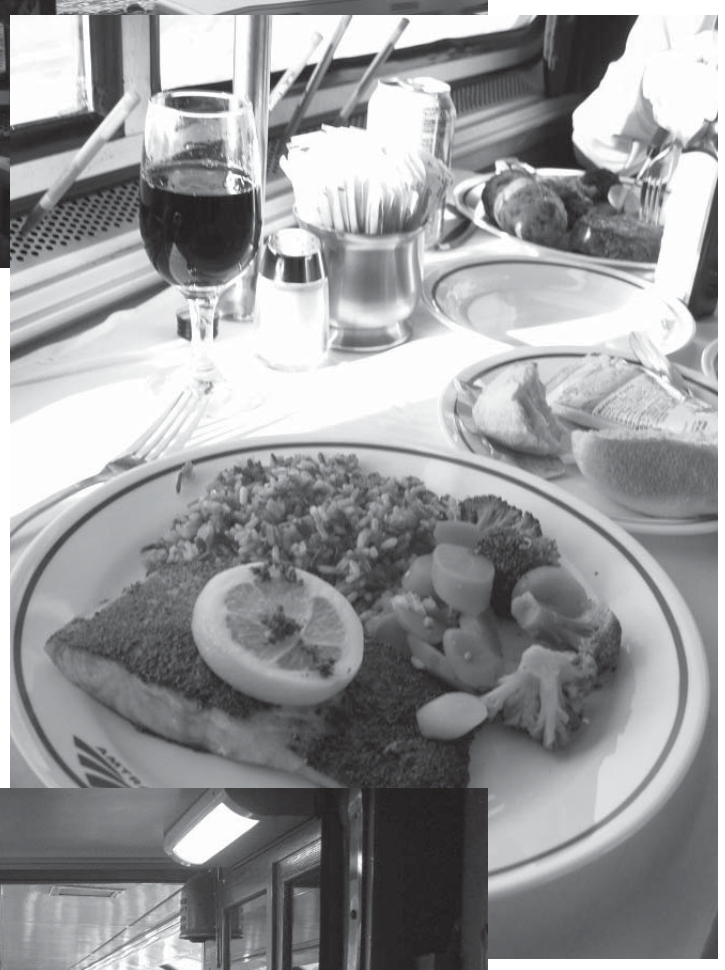
Of course, going through security relieved me of my expensive Aveeno face lotion, my Edge shave, champagne splits from Amtrak first class, stolen water bottles and a host of other things. My brain was not in airplane or airport mode, so I literally forgot!

Because I had my airline ID with me, I knew that going through the employee security check would be simple and quick. Wrong. That turned out to be a 12 minute nightmare. Thank goodness they didn’t find anything REALLY scary like embarassing adult items or weapons (is there a difference?) or a JetBlue crewmember hidden in my bags.

For you TSA naysayers, your tax dollars really do work! Needless to say, I should have popped for spending the extra five thousand points and taken the train all the way back home.

Tell us about your jouneys. Send stories and photos to larrysobczak@hotmail.com

The Coast Starlight is on the Cuesta Grade between San Luis Obispo and Paso Robles, Calif. (Amtrak Photo)



Above photo shows the view of the Pacific Ocean from the dining car on Coast Starlight. Middle photo shows a meal on the Coast Starlight. Below, here is a shot of entering the lounge on the Coast Starlight.

(Photos by JP Descamps)

Celebrate National Train Day on May 12

National Train Day is back to celebrate train travel and the ways trains touch the lives of people across America. Saturday, May 12, 2012, will be the day where train stations and other venues across the country, host activities and exhibits that highlight the past, present and future of trains and travel. Amtrak will host major events in New York, Philadelphia, Chicago and Los Angeles with free live entertainment and activities for both children and adults: interactive and educational exhibits, model train displays and tours of Amtrak equipment, and notable private railroad cars.

National Train Day marks the 143rd anniversary of the creation of the nation's first transcontinental railroad. On May 10, 1869, in Promontory Summit, Utah, the 'golden spike' was driven into the final tie that joined 1,776 miles of the Central Pacific and Union Pacific railways, forever transforming the face and character of America.

Here's a listing of events in Michigan on May 12th:

Kalamazoo Model Railroad Historical Society

The society will operate a 20 x 40 foot HO Scale Layout in display. Vintage Boyne City, Gaylord & Alpena caboose is open for tours. Refreshments, free parking, free admission.

9336 N. Riverview
Parchment, MI 49004
10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

The Railroad Café -- Bangor

The Mayor of Bangor will read a proclamation to the crew of Amtrak's Grand Rapids - to - Chicago Pere Marquette train upon arrival of the train at 9:02 a.m. followed by family-friendly events including live music, an HO scale model railroad layout, refreshments, and the Grand Opening of the ice cream shop at The Railroad Cafe.

555 Railroad Street
Bangor, MI 49013
8:30 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Fernwood Botanical Garden & Nature Preserve – Niles

Celebrate National Train Day with a visit to Fernwood Botanical Garden and Nature Preserve, and see the popular Railway Garden, designed by landscape architect and naturalist, Paul Busse. This is the fourth season for this family attraction, which features bridges, tunnels, waterfalls, and four train tracks at varying levels. Buildings are replicas of five local attractions, including Buchanan's Pears Mill, the St. Joseph Lighthouse, Notre Dame's Golden Dome, the Niles Train Depot, and new this year, the historic Niles City Hall, all made with natural materials. See fernwoodbotanical.org for more details and ticket prices.

13988 Range Line Road
Niles, MI 49120
10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

National Association of Railway Business Women- Saginaw-Great Lakes Chapter #68 -- Flint

Activities include Operation Lifesaver, NARBW Display, refreshments, model train exhibit, and more.

1407 S Dort Hwy (M-54)
Flint, MI 95340
6 a.m. to 11 a.m.

Bergmann, longtime transportation advocate, dies

Dietrich Rudolf Bergmann of Ann Arbor died April 3, 2012, at the University of Michigan Hospital after suffering a heart attack on March 26th. He was born Aug. 12, 1938 in Monroe, Mich.

He graduated from the University of Michigan with a degree in Civil Engineering. After graduation, he served as an officer in the U.S. Navy on a destroyer in the western Pacific. He then worked for an engineering firm but was frustrated by being assigned only for routine tasks because he only had a bachelor's degree. As a result, he went to Stanford University and earned a Ph.D. in Transportation Economics. When interviewed for the Ph.D. program, he was asked what he wanted to achieve. He response was characteristic, "I don't want to just build things- I want to find the best solutions possible." That was also the best summary of his life's work.

After earning his doctorate, he taught at Wayne State University in Detroit, then went on to work for GM Transportation Systems, a General Motors subsidiary which was exploring entering the railroad and mass transit markets.

In 1982 he met John DeLora, who was active in the Michigan Association of Railroad Passengers (MARP) as well as the National Association of Railroad Passengers (NARP). He was intrigued by the possibilities that these organizations offered, and he soon was elected Chairman of MARP, and was soon also elected as a member of the Board of NARP.

After he left GM, he spent a great deal of time as an expert witness in grade crossing accident cases. He also engaged in litigation to stop construction of what he considered to be wasteful projects. Before his death, he was actively trying to guide public policy decisions with the New International Trade Crossing and the Fuller Road Station in Ann Arbor.

Besides transportation, he was a very active environmentalist and worked with the Sierra Club on many environmental issues. His passion for detail and accuracy was legendary. He often worked until the wee hours of the morning studying law cases, reading reports, and drafting regulatory submittals. The breadth and depth of his research on an issue were simply breathtaking. His passion for detail and accuracy in his work drove a lot of people nuts, but they all respected his results.

Dietrich Bergmann

He loved going to the Ozarks with his children, camping, canoeing, hiking, and simply communing with nature. He led a very modest lifestyle, and everyone thought he would live an extremely long life. Those who knew him best loved him for the depth of his integrity, friendship and loyalty.

He is survived by his former wife Phyllis, his daughter Liisa, a physician in Hawaii, his son Erich, currently a nuclear power officer in the Navy and sisters Hedi and Louise.

- John DeLora

Upcoming MARP member meetings

(Meetings begin at 10 a.m., except where noted)

May – National Train Day activities pre-empt monthly meeting

June 16 – Muskegon Railroad Historical Depot, 610 Western Ave., Muskegon

July 28 – Grand Rapids, Grand Rails 2012-77th Annual NMRA National Convention, the Rapid Central Station, 2nd Floor Conference Center, Bartlett Street SW, Grand Rapids

August – no membership meeting

September 22– Durand Union Station tentative site for the annual meeting

October 13 – St. Louis Historical Society, which is housed in the c. 1910 Pere Marquette Railroad Station, 110 E. Crawford Street, St. Louis, MI

November 10 – Essex, Ont., historic Michigan Central Station, 17 miles southeast of Ambassador Bridge between Detroit and Windsor

December – no membership meeting

Grade Crossing Crashs: How to Reduce Them?

Grade-crossing crashes have always been a problem. Although steady progress has been made over the years, they still occur too often. The sad fact is that most of them can be prevented with a greater focus on education, training, research and enforcement.

Virtually everyone knows that trains can't stop as quickly as an automobile, so the temptation is to blame "dumb drivers" who fail to stop at crossings. Unfortunately, it isn't that simple. There are multiple underlying reasons for these collisions and each needs attention.

The National Limited

By John DeLora

This article argues that a joint task force should be established between the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (AASHTO) the American Association of Railroads (AAR), The American Trucking Association (ATA), the Teamsters Union, the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers/ Teamsters, the American Automobile Association and the Federal Highway Administration, with subcommittees dealing with each of the following issues.

The motor vehicle driver

• Licensing procedures should be geared to keeping unsafe drivers off the road. Although reliable statistics are impossible to find, it is a well-known fact within the trucking industry that that there are a significant number of Commercial Drivers who have fraudulently obtained multiple licenses from different states. Research needs to be done on how to minimize this practice. The American Trucking Association places a high value on safe practices and would be a critical partner in this research.

• Enforcement needs to be made more comprehensive. In the Bournabais IL crash, the driver was found to have a poor driving record, and that he should have been to five remedial driving clinics, but didn't. In the Canton Twp., MI crash which killed five teenagers, the driver of the car had three concurrent license suspensions in effect, yet his mother still allowed him to use the family vehicle. Another problem is that due to lack of public transportation, courts are often willing to restore restricted driving privileges to drivers whose licenses have been revoked. Judges are leery of taking away a person's only practical method of getting to or from work. Legal experts need to be consulted on a practical way to enforce license restrictions, suspensions and revocations which will get bad drivers off the road. How do we get bad drivers off the road? More important, how do we get the courts to enforce the law effectively? In my experience, drivers whose licenses get revoked can almost always get them re-instated for limited driving to and from work. After a point to be determined, at what point should courts order forfeiture of a driver's vehicle? How do we balance the needs of the driver against the safety of the public?

Crossing hardware and characteristics

• Signs at crossings need to have prominent 800 phone number and an identifying crossing number on both sides of the crossing. This should include all crossings, urban and rural, passenger and freight. Drivers, both commercial and private, need to be aware of these signs, what to report and to do so immediately.

• Visibility issues need to be addressed. Brush growing close to the tracks, billboards and buildings which block visibility need to be catalogued. The FHWA publication Railroad-Highway Grade Crossing Handbook contains guidance on sight distance evaluations for grade crossings, as does AASHTO's A Policy on the Geometric Design of Highways and Streets. Most states have an inventory of all grade crossings; their inventories should include any restricted visibility situations, and recommendations on how to remediate them.

• Adequate traffic storage at crossings is a problem found in all parts of the country. The most common type is where a road parallels the tracks; often, there is not enough room for a standard tractor-trailer to wait in the space between the road and the tracks. Signage may help, but is it practical to have crossing signals tied in with auto traffic signals so that vehicles cannot enter this zone?

Another problem is the temporary disruption of normal traffic patterns during construction at grade crossings. The STB found that inadequate traffic management was the primary cause of the1994 crash in Ft. Lauderdale, FL between an Amtrak train and a gasoline tanker truck which killed six people. Lane closures caused congestion which in turn led to vehicles bunching up, bumper to bumper. When the train came, the truck driver was unable to back up, and was unable to move forward quickly enough to prevent the crash.. Can a common traffic management policy be developed to prevent similar situations?

Driver psychology

• It seems incredible, but many drivers simply don't believe a train is coming even when crossing flashers are activated. Research needs to be done to determine if this is due to distractions such as talking on cellphones, entertainment devices or other inattention. Industrial psychologists need to be consulted on more effective ways of getting a driver's attention at grade crossings.

• More attention needs to be paid to researching "highway hypnosis" and ways to combat it. The truck crash with the California Zephyr last year happened in good weather with unlimited visibility, yet the truck struck the side of the train in the fifth or sixth car.

A news story gave the length of the skid marks, and after entering that into a formula, it was determined that the truck had to be going at least 83 mph before applying the brakes. It is impossible to know whether the driver was distracted by talking on a CB radio, a cell phone, texting or whether he was under the influence of what is termed "highway hypnosis." This phenomenon arises from a driver concentrating on the lane markings to the point that he unconsciously slips into a trance. Although this happens more often when a driver is tired, it can occur any time. Industrial psychologists need to be consulted on ways to remedy this, possibly by warning devices inside the vehicle. Some auto manufacturers already have these devices; should they be made mandatory for all motor vehicles?

Education

• Operation Lifesaver (www.oli.org) has made good progress in educating the public about grade crossing safety, but its funding is inadequate for the task at hand. Staffed in each state entirely by volunteers, it is a 501c3 organization; it receives some support for supplies from state departments of transportation and some donations from individuals. More sources of funding need to be identified for this organization.

• Public service announcements could be produced which drive home the need for vigilance at crossings. A funding source for producing these announcements needs to be identified.

• Education of commercial and individual drivers should be an ongoing effort as part of the licensing process.

Further reductions in grade crossing crashes can be achieved, and all of the stakeholders mentioned at the beginning of this article have an interest in reducing them. There certainly have been many consultations between many of the parties, but a more comprehensive approach may lead to greater reductions of these tragedies.

John DeLora retired in 2009 as a police officer after a 28 year career.

Recall targets transit center opponent

By Larry Sobczak

A recall effort is underway against Troy Mayor Janice Daniels who voted against hiring an architect and construction manager for the Troy Multi-Modal Transit Center in December effectively cancelling the $8.4 million federal grant to build a multi-modal transit center near Maple and Coolidge roads in the Oakland County community.

The Oakland County Election Commission unanimously approved a recall petition March 1 that cited her lead in a vote against the transit center.

The collection of signatures began early in the spring and according to the Detroit Free Press, Daniels opponents collected nearly 1,600 of the 8,000 signatures required to place it on the November ballot within the first few days of the effort.

Petition collectors have 180 days to get enough signatures to place the recall on the ballot.

The transit project was revived in January after the Troy Chamber of Commerce scrambled to win deadline extensions from the Federal Railroad Administration and to gather political support in order to put a compromise deal before the Troy City Council on Jan. 18.

Councilman Wade Fleming changed his vote and the city is now seeking a construction manager and architect contract with bidders.

The compromise deal reduces the cost of the transit center by approximately $2 million by eliminating landscaping and green energy systems used to heat and cool the facility. The transit center is funded 100 percent by federal grants.

Daniels, who was elected in November, has drawn national attention for her controversial views towards the transit center and her views about homosexuality.

Amtrak's Wolverine train passes by the future site of the Troy Multi-Modal Transit Center in March. There is no sign of construction work.

(Photo by John DeLora)

ARGUE

(Continued from page 1)

dard in any quarter and its failure to meet the All Stations On-Time Performance (OTP) standard in three of the four quarters.

- CN exceeded the allowable Host-Responsible Delay minutes for the Wolverine service in every quarter of Fiscal Year 2011.
- Due in part to CN's freight train interference and other CN-driven delays, the Wolverine service is consistently late.

In CN's response filed with the STB in March, it states that the legal premise under which Amtrak brings its charges (the Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2008, "PRIIA") may be found illegal under action brought by the Association of American Railroads and now in trial in District Court.

CN agrees in its response that Amtrak's performance is poor, but it is primarily because of factors such as:

- The level of capital investment by Amtrak
- The nature of Amtrak's schedules
- The level of freight congestion on an Amtrak's route
- The number of host railroads on an Amtrak route
- The number of interlockings on an Amtrak route
- Maintenance and weather issues

CN also states that Congress never gave Amtrak absolute preference over freight "as if it were the only user of the freight rail system." (CN quote)

In its response, CN also states that Amtrak's metrics are faulty, exaggerated and not used correctly:

- End-Point OTP- Amtrak was unable to meet its self-imposed 80% end-point OTP on 30 of its 39 nation-wide routes last year. This can hardly be all CN's fault. CN has good business reasons for its actions in the few times when it contributes to this delay.
- Host Responsible Delay- Amtrak's trains are late entering CN's system and would be delayed even if they never traveled on CN.

Amtrak's complaint, filed with the Surface Transportation Board on Jan 18, can be viewed at tinyurl.com/marp00024.

CN's response, filed on March 9, is at tinyurl.com/marp00036.

- Mike Whims & John DeLora

STUDY

(Continued from page 1)

toward achieving higher speeds along the entire Chicago to Detroit rail corridor and improving the flow of freight to the east coast," said U.S. DOT Secretary Ray LaHood. "Eliminating bottlenecks will boost the economy by reducing delays and allow for the freer flow of both people and goods throughout the region."

The U.S. DOT study is the latest momentum to bring the entire 304 mile-long line up to 110 mph between Detroit and Chicago.

Amtrak trains began running at speeds up to 110 mph between Porter and Kalamazoo in February after the Federal Railroad Administration gave its approval of improved signals along that segment.

A major hurdle to high speed service is expected to be cleared this month when the Michigan Department of Transportation buys 136 miles of the Norfolk Southern Railway between Kalamazoo and Dearborn for $149 million.

The sale of the railway will clear the way for another $200 million in signals, rail and grade crossing improvements between Kalamazoo and Dearborn that will allow passenger trains to travel up to 110 mph along that segment.

In March ground was broken on a new intermodal station next to Greenfield Village in Dearborn that will create a better link for passengers using Amtrak and other modes of transportation in the Metropolitan Detroit area.

These improvements along the Detroit to Chicago high speed line are in addition to a new station planned in Ann Arbor as well as a station reconstruction in Battle Creek and a track "flyover" under construction in Illinois that is expected to eliminate long waits for freight trains. A new station was opened in August in Pontiac which is the eastern end of the Detroit to Chicago service.

Most of the improvements are expected to take up to two years to complete and travelers between Detroit and Chicago in April got a preview of the delays expected.

Some Wolverine trains were cancelled or delayed in April to allow crews to replace worn out ties. The ties were so worn that Norfolk Southern initially wanted to permanently reduce speeds to 30 mph. The work was part of the anticipated repairs to the line and Amtrak and MDOT officials were able negotiate a solution to the proposed speed reduction with Norfolk Southern while they wait for final sale approval of the rail line.